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ABSTRACT

This paper asks: Which of the alternative views that women bring to the position of superintendent have the potential to change the nature of the position itself? The paper examines the classical "feminine" definition of power in light of its potential to support an ethical practice not often attributed to superintendents of schools, namely, an "ethic of care" (Beck 1994; Noddings 1984). Drawing on a literature review and an ethnographic study of 13 women superintendents, the paper concludes that, although not obvious, traditional gender roles in the United States have predisposed women superintendents toward a use of power that relies on caring relationships between and among people. Specifically, the study confirmed that a social-production model of power--the "power with" model--is used by a number of women because they are uncomfortable with a social-control or "power over" model. The feminine use of power can transform the leadership practices of individuals of either gender who accept the challenge of the superintendency. The sample was developed by asking a national panel of experts to identify women superintendents known for their collaborative styles and good working relations. Interviews were conducted with 13 superintendents and with their colleagues. A total of 69 interviews were conducted. (Contains 118 references.) (Author/LMI)

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**THE PROMISING INTERSECTION OF POWER AND ETHICS:
THE SUPERINTENDENCY
AS TRANSFORMED BY EURO-AMERICAN WOMEN**

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RUNNING HEAD: Power and Ethics

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Abstract

In this paper I ask: Which of the alternative views that women bring to the position of superintendent of schools have the potential to change the nature of the position itself? The purpose of my paper is to examine the classical "feminine" definition of power in light of its potential to support and embrace an ethical practice not often attributed to superintendents of schools, namely, an "ethic of care" (Beck, 1994; Noddings, 1984). Drawing on the literature and an ethnographic study of women superintendents that I conducted, I conclude that although not obvious on the surface, it might be supposed that traditional gender roles in the United States have predisposed women superintendents toward a use of power which relies on caring relationships between and among people. This "feminine" use of power holds the promise of transformed practice for anyone, female or male, who accepts the challenges of the powerful position of superintendent of schools.

I very seldom get things done alone. I can't think of anything where both collaboration and caring aren't a part of what I am -- where they are not a part of my outcome. The people work harder when they can work together, I think, and when they are not fearful of consequences. But they also have to know that you care about them.

(woman superintendent)

From my perspective, superintendents who practice power over others in a controlling and even dictatorial way are working at a considerable distance from those who are less powerful. In addition, I believe that this distance makes it not impossible but difficult for the same superintendents to behave in an ethical "caring" way toward the less powerful -- teachers and children, among others. If, however, superintendents define and practice power as collaboration and consensus-building which relies on positive, less hierarchical relationships between people, the doors open for connection and caring. It is when power (Miller, 1993) and ethics (Noddings, 1984) are both defined in the classical "feminine" sense that the two concepts intersect and become mutually supportive. While this intersection may seem transparent to many, it is not discussed in literature related to the practice of superintendents. Given this neglected area of inquiry, the overall intent of this paper is to explore the promise of the intersection between power and ethics by drawing both on relevant literature and an ethnographic study of women superintendents that I conducted.

If, as the literature reflects, women see, know, and understand their world differently than men (Belenky, Clinchy, Godberger & Tarule, 1986; Brunner, 1995; Cantor & Bernay, 1992; Della Costa, 1972; Edson, 1988; Lather, 1991; Marshall, 1985; Minh-ha, 1989; Ortiz, 1982; Porat, 1991; Schmuck, 1975; Sexton, 1976; Shakeshaft, 1989; Vianello, Siemienska, Damian, Lupri, Coppi, D'Arcangela & Bolasco, 1990), it is reasonable to suggest that women, in the typically "male" position of superintendent of schools, have alternative views on how to approach their practice while in the position. It is also reasonable to believe that these alternative views have the potential to positively shape and eventually transform the current normative practices of female and male superintendents (see Adler, Laney & Packer, 1993; Porat, 1991).

In this paper I ask: Which of the alternative views that women bring to the position of superintendent of schools have the potential to change the nature of the position itself? The purpose of my paper is to examine the classical "feminine" definition of power in light of its potential to support and embrace an ethical practice not often attributed to superintendents of schools, namely, an "ethic of care" (Beck, 1994; Noddings, 1984). To this end, anchored in my ethnographic study, I contrast masculine and feminine approaches to power and ethics. These contrasts are not meant to perpetuate the dualism between women and men. Rather, I suggest that characteristics often considered "merely feminine," and thus less useful and less valued by our current culture, hold promise for all of us -- men and women -- as we work to transcend gender in advancing morality in the workplace.

The paper is organized as follows. I begin by reviewing the previously established need in educational administration for what Noddings (1984) refers to as an "ethic of care" -- in contrast to the more commonly held notion that equates ethics with the principles of justice (Kymlicka, 1990) -- then I review the relevant literature on power and ethics as they relate to "feminine" conceptions of both.

After presenting the method and design of my ethnographic study, I present my findings. In broad strokes, I share the study's narrative data that reveals not only the alternative definitions and practices of power that were characteristic of the women superintendents in the study, but also the intersection of power and ethics in their rhetoric. Following my review of the findings, I conclude by suggesting that the unique relationship between the concepts of power and ethics in the practice of women superintendents can potentially transform the fundamental nature of the normative practices of women and men in the position of superintendent of schools.

Why an "Ethic of Care?" An Exploration of Relevant Literature

When we look clear-eyed at the world today, we see it wracked with fighting, killing, vandalism, and psychic pain of all sorts. One of the saddest features of this picture of violence is that the deeds are so often done in the name of principle (Noddings, 1984, p. 1).

When "we look clear-eyed" at the position of the superintendent of schools today, "we see it wracked" with "psychic pain of all sorts." The sources of this pain are numerous (see Arnez, 1981; Blumberg, 1985; Griffiths, 1966; Leithwood, 1995; Moore-Johnson, in press; Tyack & Hansot, 1982), but perhaps the most obvious is the external pressure from myriad constituencies and interest groups (Crowson, 1992; Johnson, 1995; Lutz & Mertz, 1992). Superintendents may desire to respond and act appropriately, carefully, and ethically, but as Beck (1992) states:

[C]onscientious school officers are likely to find themselves rushing from one crisis to another, taking action to quell the more obvious or serious problems before moving on to other issues. Clearly, what is needed is an organizing perspective, an understanding of education and leadership, which can assist leaders in sifting through and prioritizing demands and in making wise decisions regarding their actions and responses (p. 58).

Beck proposes that an ethic of caring could "provide a solid foundation for such a perspective." She also offers a caring ecological model of schooling which responds to challenges she believes to be pivotal in discussions of educators' tasks (p. 58). The challenges she identifies are: "1) administering schools in ways that result in improved performances -- of students and teachers; 2) addressing a host of social problems within and through schools; and 3) rethinking organizational structures so that schools will be better able to meet the preceding challenges" (p. 58).¹

The reason I am most interested in this particular type of ethical approach to practice in the superintendency is related to what Noddings (1984) says in the quote at the beginning of this section: "When we look clear-eyed at the world today, we see it wracked with fighting, killing, vandalism, and psychic pain of all sorts" (p.1). Superintendents not only experience "pain" while in their positions, but are also, like Noddings, concerned about the pain in the world. I suggest that the current profile of political power that is endorsed by our culture and expected of superintendents is less than supportive of their desire to substantively address some of the

widespread pain in our environment. This suggestion, in part, reflects my own experiences as a public school administrator.

When I was a public school principal I worked to relate to others in a way informed by my own sense of morality. As time passed, I discovered a heart-felt need to more fully develop an ethic of care in my practice. Like Noddings (1984), I came to believe that relation is "ontologically basic" and caring relation is "ethically basic" (p. 3). I was dissatisfied with certain dominant but limited definitions such as: "power" as control over others; "ethics" as principles of justice; and moral practice as the achievement of objectivity and detachment rather than the ability to engage responsively and with care (Gilligan, 1982, p. xix). I wished for an articulation of these concepts that resonates with my "feminine" instincts.

I am not alone in my discomfort, for many feminists believe the traditional debates about power and ethics have been excessively narrow in three main ways. First, they have been conceptually narrow, ignoring certain understandings of power and ethics that evolve from the experiences of women. Second, analysts have assumed that power and ethics must be analyzed within traditional political communities, such as nations, states, and local general jurisdiction governments, while ignoring families, churches, schools, and other associations of "everyday life." Third, these debates have been methodologically limited; even those who have challenged orthodox ideas about power and ethics have generally employed traditional scientific and philosophical methods to develop their positions.

An Ethics of Justice: A Problem for Women

Feminist critiques and analyses have dealt with ethics more completely than with power. Carol Gilligan (1982) initiated the feminist attack on the narrow conceptions of the ethics of justice that preoccupied contemporary political philosophy. According to Gilligan, moral philosophers have assumed that the ethics of justice requires acting on the basis of some formal and abstract principles which prioritize competing rights. Gilligan suggested that such conceptions of ethics reflect a masculine morality that emphasizes the formal rules of (boy's) games, rather than a feminine morality that emphasizes the give and take and contexts of human relationships.² Noddings (1984), Tronto (1994) and others have asserted that theories of ethics cannot be

completely specified through abstract principles, but must also encompass "an ethic of care."

Feminists have also noted that studies of justice address the fairness of distribution among a nation's citizens (e.g., Kuenne, 1993) or various political sub-communities (e.g., Mladenka, 1980; Mier, 1993), and have ignored distribution in the family and other non-governmental social units. Yet some of the greatest injustices occur within these latter institutions (Kozol, 1991). According to Susan Okin (1989), the failure to recognize that "the personal is the political" has been a grave defect of justice theories, because injustices that occur in our most personal social units, such as families and schools contribute to larger social injustices, because families, schools, and other face-to-face institutions are the training grounds for citizens. Such feminists as Kay Boals (1975) and Paula Baker (1984) thus argued that politics is a much more inclusive activity than the actions taken (or not taken) by governmental authorities or through governmental institutions, and inferred that justice requires a fair distribution of goods among members of voluntary associations as well as within governmental jurisdictions.

Finally, feminists have noted the inadequacies of traditional philosophical approaches to constructing ethical principles of justice, and of traditional scientific approaches to analyzing the fairness of distributions within communities. This dissatisfaction with traditional scientific methods used in research related to ethics will be discussed further in the methods section.

Conceptions of Power

Theoretical analyses of the concept of power generally occur along two trajectories (Pitkin, 197, p. 276-77; Hartsock, 1981, p. 3-19; Clegg, 1988, p. 21-38; Stone, 1989, p. 219-33; Wartenberg, 1990, p. 9-50). The dominant trajectory in the history of political thought and in contemporary political science defines power as control, command, domination over others -- as "power over" (Clegg, 1988; Hartsock, 1981). The subordinate (less emphasized, analyzed, and appreciated) trajectory defines power as a capacity to accomplish certain social goals through cooperation among agents with various interests and concerns -- as "power with/to" (Follett, 1942; Sarason, 1990). This section is a brief review of the scholarly literature on the concept of power to make the point that female theorists have been more likely than male theorists to emphasize the collaborative conception of power. And, although not obvious on the surface, traditional gender

roles in the United States have predisposed women toward "power with/to" and have drawn men to social roles which expect them to exercise "power over." It will be seen that women superintendents in this study have emphasized "power with/to" in their practice.

According to John Stuart Mill (1869, p. 208), "A man's power is the readiness of other men to obey him." It would be convenient to assert that this quotation sums up a long lineage of male political philosophers discussing power as a male property in terms that are exclusively competitive, controlling, commanding. As Wartenberg (1990), Clegg (1989), Hartsock (1981), and others have shown, however, great works in the history of political thought cannot be so simply read. It is more accurate to assert that contemporary political scientists and sociologists have largely conceived and analyzed power as command, control, and domination. The dominant trajectory of power research in this century emerged from the work of Max Weber (1924), who defined power as the imposition of one's will upon the behavior of others and who regarded domination by authorities and obedience by subordinates as important requisites to social action and bureaucratic performance.

Bertrand Russell (1938), Harold Lasswell and Abraham Kaplan (1950), and Herbert Simon (1953) each contributed to the social-control paradigm of power by seeking to define power in operational terms that facilitated scientific analysis of the concept. By defining power as a change in the behavior of an actor that is produced by another agent, Simon not only distinguished power from such resources as wealth and status -- which might contribute to it -- but he provided a definition of power that, at least in principle, permitted its direct measurement. Such an understanding of power became central to the theory of pluralism, the orthodox model of political power structures in political science at the height of the behavioral revolution. Robert Dahl (1961), Jack Nagel (1975), and Nelson Polsby (1980) each insisted that power could be detected, measured, and analyzed only by measuring the policy preferences of various actors and the actual outcomes of concrete political decisions. The existence of a dominant group, a power elite, could be demonstrated only by showing that elites consistently got what they wanted in the policy process while the resulting policies consistently ran counter to the preferences of other (subordinate) groups. According to pluralist analyses, "power over" was widely exercised in

various political communities and indeed was central to all political processes, but power elites were difficult to discern in the fragmented power structures of America.

While radical political analysts disputed this conclusion and the methods of pluralists, they continued to conceive of power as domination and control. According to Bachrach and Baratz (1962), pluralists examined only one "face" of power: the power that was exercised after issue agendas and policy preferences were set. They suggested that "power over" or controlling power was much more extensive and concentrated than was suggested by observing the broad participation of various groups and interests in policy formulation. A second face of "power over" was discernible in the capacity of a small number of elites to control the agenda of American politics by preventing issues that could generate radical change from receiving serious consideration. A third face of "power over" was also discernible in the ideological hegemony that powerful interests had over the general public. By influencing what people wanted -- by getting people to want outcomes that departed from their true needs and instead conformed to what the elite wanted them to want -- elites could exercise a rather hidden but highly pervasive form of domination (Lukes, 1974; Schumaker, 1991).

Beyond the three faces of "power over," a number of male theorists have also sought to conceptualize other forms of domination. During the 1970s, Michel Foucault defined power as a mechanism that excludes, rejects, denies, obstructs, and obfuscates; for Foucault (1977), this "disciplinary power" which he uncovered in various "disciplines" -- medicine, psychiatry, penology, criminology, and the various social sciences -- transformed human beings into subjects, persuading humans to participate in their own subjection (Ball, 1993, p. 27-28). In his early writings, Clarence Stone (1980) discussed "systemic power" as durable features of social, economic, and political systems that consistently advantage some groups while disadvantaging others. Such innovative conceptions of power moved away from the behavioral approaches that measured how individuals were controlled and instead embraced more structural approaches that focused on the controlling properties of social systems writ large. But these conceptions continued along the "power over" trajectory that has dominated political science and sociology (Hartsock, 1987).

While (mostly) male political theorists and scientists were proposing and analyzing these various aspects of "power over," and while they were debating among themselves the scientific viability of these conceptions of power, the most prominent female political theorist of the twentieth century, Hannah Arendt, sought to reestablish the trajectory of power that had been largely abandoned by contemporary analysts. According to Arendt (1972, p. 143), "Power corresponds to the human ability not just to act but to act in concert. Power is never the property of an individual; it belongs to a group and remains in existence only so long as the group keeps together." Arendt was concerned that politics had degenerated into a mere power struggle, characterized by the use of strength, force, and violence. For Arendt, politics was more than a matter of domination; it was or could be a process by which free and equal agents create collective power, the capacity to act in concert to achieve collectively those common goals that individuals cannot achieve for themselves. Politics thus involves acts of persuasion, communication, and cooperation that establish collaborative relationships among people and that enable transformations of problematic social conditions. Power, then, is a capacity that a community of people attain when their acts of communication, cooperation and collaboration have been successful (see Wartenberg, 1990, p. 33-50, and Ball, 1993, p. 20-25).

Arendt's approach to the concept of power was emphasized and elaborated by Nancy Hartsock (1981, 1983), who clearly differentiated a masculine emphasis on power as domination from an alternative feminine tradition. According to Hartsock (1983, p. 210),

theories of power put forward by women rather than men differ systematically from the understanding of power as domination. While few women have theorized about power, their theories bear a striking similarity both to one another and to theories of power recently characterized as feminist understandings of power. My several cases clearly constitute only suggestive evidence for my argument. Yet I believe it is significant that I was unable to discover any woman writing about power who did not stress those aspects of power related to energy, capacity, and potential.

Hartsock did not propose a fixed alternative conception to power as domination, but found intriguing possibilities in the writings of such women as Arendt, Dorothy Emmet, and Hannah

Pitkin. In Arendt, she saw a model in which the heroic person finds her power not through dominating others in competitive situations, but through "action in connection with others with whom one shares a common life and common concerns" (Hartsock, 1983, p. 217). In Emmet (1953-54), she saw a useful distinction between coercive power and coactive power, and found a hopeful attempt to redefine power as "any kind of effectiveness in performance" (Hartsock, 1983, p. 223). In Pitkin (1972, p. 275), she saw an attempt to connect power to community and the capacity of the community to act toward common ends.

These feminine notions about power are in evidence in a recent essay on "Women and Power" by Jean Baker Miller (1993). Miller claimed that women have been powerful in ways that are transparent next to the masculine perspective of power as domination. Women have, according to Miller, traditionally experienced their power by producing change and by empowering others through their roles as mothers and teachers. According to Miller, "Women use power all the time, but generally must see it as used for the benefit of others"; a woman's identity demands that her power be regarded as neither destructive nor selfish for fear that she will be abandoned, and thus women are encouraged to use their capacities in collaborative ways that serve the needs of broader communities.

In short, an impressive number of women have written about power in a way that distinguishes "power over" from "power with/to," that generally rebukes applications of "power over," and that finds "power with/to" more compatible with the roles and experiences of women. This is not to say that "power with/to" is an exclusively feminist idea and has been ignored by men.³ The work of Jurgen Habermas (1981) can be seen as an extension of Arendt's model and an attempt to facilitate collaborative exercises of power (Ball, 1993, p. 24-25). The realist model of power developed principally by Jeffrey Isaac (1993) regards power as something that exists in social roles (prior to any behavioral application) and is necessary for coordinated social action; as such this model regards power as more essential to social productivity than social control. Further, the regime model of power developed by Clarence Stone (1989) holds that the increasingly fragmented structure of societies, in which political communities are held together by loose networks of institutional arrangements, make "comprehensive social control impossible"; the costs

of getting dissident elements of the community to comply with central commands are impossibly great. According to Stone (1989, p. 227), the contemporary (urban) political regime must use collaborative power.

In a fragmented world, the issue is how to bring about enough cooperation among disparate community elements to get things done -- and to do so in the absence of an overarching command structure or a unifying system of thought.

Each of these men began to reconceptualize power in ways that emphasize its cooperative and collaborative aspects and recognize that the achievement of social power serves the goals of a community and does not simply subordinate some people to the will of others. Thus, the social-production model of power is not only a feminist idea that represents the experiences of women; it may also be an increasingly emergent paradigm of power whose development coincides with the continued maturation of democratic processes in increasingly pluralistic and fragmented societies.

I suggest that new understandings of power, significantly influenced by feminist theory, are beginning to gain prominence in political science and other disciplines concerned with the application of political power. While feminist justice theorists believe that an ethic of care must complement principles of rights, feminist power theorists believe that analyses of power as "social production" must complement analyses of power as "social domination" (Stone, 1989, p. 219-33). In other words, feminists view orthodox conceptions of power as incorporating masculine preoccupations with how people control one another to secure their personal wants, and they suggest that such conceptions must be complemented with more feminine concerns about how people can effectively organize themselves to solve social problems and transform their environments. Traditional understandings of power as "social control" of others must be complemented with emerging understandings of power as "social production." In no small measure, I believe that the productive model of power is appropriate for the pluralistic and fragmented cultures found in schools. Further, I assert that the social production model -- potentially a model able to honor and value collective efforts involving all people -- is an essential element in any caring school culture lead by a superintendent wishing to address, at least in part, the "pain of all sorts" in today's world. I believe that "action in connection with others with whom

one shares a common life and common concerns" (Hartsock, 1983, p. 217) is evidence of an ethic of care.

To further explore the intersection of power and ethics, I did an ethnographic study of Euro-American superintendents. The next section of the paper discusses my study and findings.

An Ethnographic Study: Method and Design

Conventional scientific methods have proven useful for describing and explaining the underrepresentation of women in positions of authority. Take, for example, the underrepresentation of women in the position of superintendent of schools. Approximately 94 percent of all school superintendents are men despite the prevalence of women in teaching positions (Blount, 1993; Glass, 1992; Shakeshaft, 1989). Lack of role models, lack of support from networks and mentors, lack of experience in leadership positions in non-governmental institutions, and family demands are among the many factors thought to contribute to such underrepresentation (Campbell, 1991; Edson, 1988; Lynch, 1990; Marshall, 1984; Schmuck, 1975; Shakeshaft, 1979; Tyack & Hansot, 1982; Whitaker & Lane, 1990; Yeakey, Johnston, & Adkison, 1986). Further, conventional methods allow analyses of gender differences in the levels and effectiveness of various forms of participation, and have been used to describe certain differences in the political styles of men and women. The few existing studies of gender differences in political styles did employ different methods; the more ethnographic the research method, the greater the observed style differences among men and women.

Schlozman's, et. al. (1995) conclusion that women act like men was based on fixed-format questionnaires mailed to members of various groups that were active in lobbying Washington officials, and these questionnaires provided female and male respondents no opportunities to indicate different conceptions of politics and power. In contrast, Kirkpatrick (1974) used more open-ended interviews, and Mansbridge (1986) incorporated participant observation techniques that seem to have facilitated greater recognition of distinctive feminine styles in using political power. Schlozman and her collaborators seem to have recognized that a feminist conception of power as social production may best be studied through less restrictive ethnographic methods than

these researchers employed, exhorting "others to use other methods to elaborate upon our results" (Schlozman, Burns, Verba, and Donahue, 1995, p. 289; see also Verba, 1990, p. 569).

Further, such feminists as Sandra Harding (1986, p. 9) believe that traditional scientific methods serve "regressive social tendencies" and are "culturally coercive" because they take as givens traditional social practices and beliefs. The studies of Lawrence Kohlberg on moral development (1958, 1981) exemplify the inadequacies of traditional methodologies, according to Gilligan (1982). Kohlberg's analytical framework, which employs male idealizations as the standard of justice by which to measure moral development, cannot hear or comprehend any alternative moral reasoning -- "a different voice," in Gilligan's resonant phrase -- that derives from different life experiences and values than those of the deductive philosopher or the inductive scientist. Accordingly, Gilligan and other feminists believe that ethics must be understood by letting the moral agent express her own understandings of the requirements of moral action as she experiences these requirements in concrete and personalized circumstances.

In short, an ethno-methodological approach is necessary to enlarge understanding of power and ethics. While the traditional methods of philosophy and science ask whether ideas and the people who hold these ideas conform to pre-existing understandings, ethnographic research that allows for a less inhibited expression of ideas permits me to question and reconceptualize previous understandings.

The Process

This ethnography focuses specifically on women because women's voices get lost when studies of the superintendency assume that male behavior is appropriate for the understanding of all behavior (Shakeshaft, 1993, p. 94). It was the narratives of women superintendents and the narratives of people who knew their practice that I pursued in this study. In order to meet my research objective -- to examine the potential that the "feminine" definition and use of power holds for supporting and enhancing an ethic of care -- I first identified a sample of women superintendents who were reputed to be superior, well-liked, successful, supported in their practice, and, most important, who defined and used power in the "feminine" sense as collaboration, consensus-building, or shared with others; i. e., "power with/to" or "social

production." The identification process included receiving input from a national panel of experts who know superintendents. The panel included two national head hunters, two executive directors of professional superintendent associations, five university professors, and two owners of large private businesses -- all from different parts of the nation. I asked each panel member to identify women superintendents who were superior, well-liked, successful, and who used other people in decision-making processes. From this input, I developed a list of fifteen women superintendents for this study.

The next stage of the research served to validate the assertions of my national panel that the women on my list defined power as "power to" and used a social production model of power in their decision-making processes. This stage included face-to-face interviews (60 to 90 minutes) with the women on the list and with others who knew them. The interviews, which were recorded and transcribed, were conducted in settings most convenient for the participants (most often in their offices). Logistics demanded that a few interviews be conducted over the phone. Out of fifteen women on the original list, thirteen fit my criteria. The two women not included in the final project had the rhetoric of collaboration, but in triangulation I found that others perceived them as top-down leaders. Thus, although I interviewed and triangulated the interviews for all fifteen women on the original list, for this project I have only used the narratives of thirteen women who fit the profile, plus the narratives of people around them.

I used three questions to begin each interview with the women superintendents: 1) Define power. 2) Describe how you get things done; how you make decisions. 3) Explain why you do things that way. After these questions were answered, the interview approach was non-standardized, a free-flowing and spontaneous movement guided by cues from the interviewee which enable the understanding of multiple realities and inner perspectives of the participants (Patton, 1980; Guba and Lincoln, 1981). In addition, I followed guidelines established by Lather (1991) for postpositivist inquiry.

When following those guidelines, first, I made certain that the participants were aware of my position in the study -- that they understood the biases and past experiences which constructed my point of view. Second, I followed the advice of the respondents when deciding on the

sequencing and timing of the triangulation and reciprocity interviews in order that maximum collaboration occur. When triangulating the data gathered from the women, I asked three similar questions of people close enough to each superintendent to know her work habits. Those questions were: 1) Define power. 2) How do you think the superintendent defines power? 3) How does the superintendent make decisions? get things done? Triangulation was done with at least two people (total 36) around each superintendent -- central office administrators, board of education members, powerwielders in the community, building-level administrators, and teachers.

Third, I made certain that respondents had copies of their own transcripts and my interpretations of those transcripts in order for them to be a part of the collaborative data analysis. Respondents were extremely interested and involved in this analysis, enabling me to practice a fourth requirement of postpositivist inquiry; i. e., reciprocity. As part of the reciprocity process, I conducted at least one other 60 to 90 minute interview (done after every respondent had a first interview, and that interview was triangulated), which was transcribed and used to inform and shape earlier narratives. A total of sixty-nine interviews were conducted for this study.

Fourth, I asked participants to enter that part of the collaborative process that makes sense of the emerging grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967)). I kept a journal of developing themes and noted where they were supported in the transcripts I was collecting. I noted position and gender of each person interviewed and involved them in my data analysis as I constantly compared narratives from other (anonymous) districts in the study. Again, I remained a learner, as we worked collaboratively to make sense of our experiences and the narratives. Finally, while in the field I took the position of "learner" rather than "expert." When making my position known to the participants, I suggested that I would benefit and change as a result of the information they shared with me. Indeed, this research has changed me and my perception of the world.

The Participants

The final list of superintendents for this study included thirteen women from the extreme northeast, northern midwest, central midwest, and extreme southeast portions of the United States. These women had responsibility for from just below 1,400 to approximately 600,000 students. At the time of the study, one state superintendent was responsible for over 600,000 students (This is a

loose approximation in order to maintain the confidentiality of the participant.), five superintendents were responsible for 50,000 to 130,000 students, two were responsible for between 8,000 and 50,000, and five were responsible for less than 4,000.

Of the participants, all were European-American and ranged in age from mid-40s to mid-50s. Eight of the participants had earned doctorates in education. Of the five women without doctorates, one is working on a dissertation for a doctorate and four have masters degrees. The women had been in the position for varying lengths of time -- from one to eight years. Seven had been in their positions three or less years, and six had been in place four or more years.

The Analysis

The lived experiences of the participants served as data for the study. "Data are used differently," as Lather (1991, p. 150) states, "rather than to support an analysis, they are used demonstrably, performatively." Eisner (1988) supports this particular use of data when he states that "it is more important to understand what people experience than to focus simply on what they do" (p. x). This focus on the importance of experience in educational research is echoed in the works of Greene (1991), Connelly and Clandenin (1988), Miller (1992), Ayers (1992), and Schubert, (1992). Furthermore, although there is a current emphasis on the significance of teachers' experiences, very little work has been focused on administrators' experiences; particularly, according to Shakeshaft (1989), there are few individual accounts, biographies, histories, case studies, or ethnographies centered on women administrators (p. 56). This study adds a relevant piece to existing knowledge in educational research by providing individual accounts of the lived experiences of women superintendents.

In keeping with established methods of qualitative research (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles & Huberman, 1983; Strauss, 1987) data analysis should occur as much as possible during the research process. It is continuous and takes place at many levels for different reasons. Since collaboration with the respondents was one of the goals of the method used, the analysis of the data was a shared activity at as many levels as possible. Further, during reciprocity respondents were asked to analyze their own positions as well as the positions revealed in the collection of ideas and theories of the other participants.

Suggestions from the respondents for further direction in data collection were followed.

This constant comparative method (Conrad, 1982) of analysis followed three steps. First, data analysis was done in the field as data were collected. At this level, analysis was done to create additional questions to be used in upcoming interviews (I asked respondents to help with this.). In addition, my own interpretations of the ideas I heard in interviews were shared with the respondents during the interview process. I asked questions to make certain that I understood the meaning intended both explicitly and implicitly.

Second, data analysis was done to organize the data, to pull it together into a taxonomy or category. Three steps of organizing the data were used: unitizing, categorizing, and relating. The purpose of unitizing was to identify and record essential information units. A unit is a single piece of information able to stand by itself: it is self-explanatory (Hosti, 1969, in Herzog, 1986; Skrtic, 1985). Every interview was divided into units of information with each unit coded with a designation for the respondent. Coding was done in order that the item's content could be traced back to raw field or interview notes while preserving the confidentiality of the participants. Categorizing was done to bring those units relating to the same content together into a loose taxonomy. Units were physically separated into separate files on the computer and sorted into groups or categories of similar content. Relating was done after the units were categorized. Each category was analyzed in terms of its relationship to other categories. I used a system of color coding the material and posted memos to myself (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss, 1987) in order to reflect constantly on what relationships or connections I was developing. After analysis, related categories were placed under even larger headings which eventually became an outline of the research data. Finally, data analysis occurred during the writing process so that I was able to write what was seen and heard in a way that translated as clearly as possible to the reader (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Analysis of the Narrative

The portions of the narratives of relevance for this particular study fell into three different categories: 1) women superintendents and power; 2) women superintendents and ethics; and, 3)

women superintendents and the intersection of power and ethics.

In order to determine how the women in the study defined and used power, I asked the following lead questions: 1) Define power. 2) Describe how you get things done; how you make decisions. 3) Explain why you do things that way? The opening questions about power were structured and direct, while the discussion of ethics was completely unstructured. I purposely did not ask specific questions about ethics because I wanted to discover whether an ethic of care was an inherent part of these women's practice, and further, what part it played in their conception and use of power. My findings in the field reinforced various theoretical perspectives as discussed below.

Women Superintendents and Power

Nancy Hartsock (1987, p. 276-277) agrees with other theorists that the idea of power in "social control" is significantly different than power as "social production," and she takes this division further by calling for a theory of power for women -- a theory which begins from the experience and point of view of the dominated. She points out, "Such theories would give attention not only to the ways women are dominated, but also to their capacities, abilities, and strengths. . . . [Said] theories would use these capacities as guides for a potential transformation of power relationships -- that is for the empowerment of women" (p.158). Women's need for a transformation in power relationships is implied in Marshall's (1985) message when she states that ". . . men have been equated with power, while the power women were perceived to have was largely a reflection of the power of the man with or for whom they worked. Women did [do] not have power on their own" (p. 12). Women struggle with this contradiction, particularly while they occupy a position that is viewed as powerful -- such as the superintendency. Adler, Laney, and Packer (1993) found that women even in less powerful positions had difficulty reconciling their role as women with any idea of power. This is evident when they quote a teacher in their study as saying, "I was brought up to be a good little girl! And power doesn't sit easily with that" (p. 95). This makes clear the perceived contradiction between being powerful and being "feminine." One of the women in my study said it this way:

I have a difficult time with the word power because it has negative connotations for

me [as a woman].

Another stated:

I'm always a little bit surprised when people talk about the power that one holds as a superintendent because it really doesn't seem that particular concept of what power has been is part of my definition [original emphasis].

Susan Moore Johnson (1995) talks about a particular selection process in which a board of education wished to hire a superintendent with participatory skills. It is not a surprise to me that the person hired was a woman, as I found that successful women superintendents, in this study, are committed collaborators. Johnson relates the following [my emphases throughout], "In another town, the newly-appointed superintendent said that she believed her predecessor had been seen as having had 'a very strong management focus. . . . a top-down approach.' As an alternative, she offered **participation** for all parties, which one school board member recalled her featuring during the search: 'During her interview, she spoke about her prior experience and successes at having done that -- **including** the parents, involving the business community . . . and her very strong commitment to professional development [for teachers] . . . ' A central office administrator believed that her effort to present herself as a leader who could promote **participation** had worked. 'I don't think there's any question that they felt she was a **consensus builder**. . . . I think at the time that's what this community needed. I think we needed somebody who could make people feel as though they were part of the project" (p. 74).

In empirical research, I found that women in positions of power are viewed as successful (Brunner & Duncan, 1994) when they practice a female definition of power, "power to" -- an ability to act or enable others to act (Sarason, 1990, p. 61) or "power with -- a jointly developed power, a co-active power" (Follett, 1942, p. 101). That is, "[w]omen who attain positions of power are most successful when they adopt female approaches to power which stress collaboration, inclusion, and consensus-building -- models based on the belief that one person is not more powerful than another" (Brunner, 1995, p. 24). Jacobs and McClelland (1994) agree that "power [with]to" women in positions of authority are more favorably regarded than "power over" women.

Women in my study who believed in and practiced this "feminine" approach to power had a unique sound as they talked about power. One woman stated her views as follows:

I see power as something you don't get, but something someone gives to you. You don't take it. Because of the way I work with people, and the fact that I respect people, I have a great deal of respect, so I have very little trouble getting people to work successfully in their roles. I don't try to control people.

This superintendent believes that power is a gift to her from others. She feels strongly that the way she gets things done is with other people -- that is, relationships are key when accomplishing things. This attitude was echoed again and again from other successful women superintendents.

Others responded with these statements:

- *I guess I would define power as the ability to get things done through other people.*
- *You need to be able to let go of your power. You need to have other people become powerful around you so that they will want to bring positive change and have the power to do that. . . . [You do that] by being a good consensus builder, by bringing people in and helping them to become leaders in their own roles in your school system.*
- *Power to me means serving. It's servant leadership. That is a position of power you really have. . . . It's the ability -- power means assisting other people to accomplish their goals, and that has a lot to do with the issues of collaboration and linking --Linkage and bringing people together.*
- *You really give yourself power when you watch the success of those that you work with It [power] is the freedom for people to be all that they can be I believe that you don't make decisions in isolation.*
- *I guess that I would say that power is the ability to bring consensus and get*

things done that have to be done . . .

- *There are several versions [of power] -- there's certainly personal power, there's position power, and then there's power to build coalitions.*
- *To me the definition of power is a sense that I had a part in making something happen that maybe wouldn't have happened without my part in it.*

The women in this study report that they use power in a collaborative, inclusive consensus-building model with their own voices heard in concert with others rather than in authority or dominance over others.

Triangulation

A skeptical reader could suppose that the noble self-reports from these women superintendents about the importance of others are merely rhetorical and never actually carried out in practice. The triangulation process proved this notion false. When I interviewed people who knew and worked with the women superintendents in the study, I asked them to tell me how their superintendent made decisions and got things done. Some of their comments are related to the way these women stay in the background as they work through others to get things accomplished.

- *Dr. (Name) wields power through other people. She is a very capable leader.*
- *She is less than direct -- it is more of a background substance that she possesses that is not confrontational, not frontal.*
- *She resisted the temptation to take the front position and recognized that the win had to be in a plurality. She listens, collaborates, gets the best out of the people who are available to her.*
- *She is a quietly powerful person. She does not wield the power.*

Other comments are directly related to the collaborative nature of the women superintendents' decision-making processes.

- *I have rarely seen someone work as effectively as she does in two areas: 1) building consensus and laying the foundation in moving things in the direction that she wants them to move, but one step at a time; and, 2) in her delegation of authority to cause the people who work for her to be highly motivated.*

- *She's very much into a team effort. She's very much into getting as many people as is practical involved and allowing everyone an opportunity to have their say.*

- *Dr. (Name)[when making a decision] will come in with an issue and then people will talk about that backwards, forwards, inside and out. She questions people and they question each other. It's a very open forum.*

- *I guess the best way I would describe it [her decision-making style] is a participatory style of management. She involves a lot of people in decision-making. To the point where a decision really may not be even classified as her own, but it's classified as a group decision.*

- *[in decision-making] She looks to the group a lot. Whatever group that may be. If it's a group of teachers, if it's a board subcommittee, if it's administrative cabinet, if it's a parent group, she'll look to the group for ideas, for input. She's not afraid obviously to share her ideas and put forth her position, her values, her beliefs about a particular situation, but she does it in such a way that she's not forcing it on people. She's not, and I don't even know how to characterize this, it's not as if the decision had already been made, and she's just simply going through the motions of asking for input and asking for involvement on the part of other people. She truly does seek, accept and use the ideas and input that people provide to her.*

Reports, given during triangulation, about the decision-making styles of the thirteen women in my

study revealed that they stayed in the background as they worked with others, in collaboration, to get things accomplished.

Women Superintendents and Ethics

Again, my findings were reinforced by various theoretical frameworks. For example, Nel Noddings (1984) moves ethics, the philosophical study of morality, from a concentration on the masculinized hierarchical moral reasoning of principles and propositions to the feminized moral responsiveness of human caring and the memory of caring and being cared for (p. 1). She argues that ethics approached through law and principles is, in the classical sense, the approach of the detached one, of the father, not of the mother (p. 2). The approach of the mother is feminine in that it is "rooted in receptivity, relatedness, and responsiveness," but "[t]his does not imply that all women will accept it or that men will reject it; indeed, there is no reason why men should not embrace it. . . . It does not imply either that logic is to be discarded or that logic is alien to women. It represents an alternative to present views, one that begins with the moral attitude or longing for goodness and not with moral reasoning" (p. 2).

Women, Noddings asserts, when "[f]aced with a hypothetical moral dilemma," . . . "often ask for more information. . . ." They "need to talk to the participants, to see their eyes and facial expressions, to receive what they are feeling. Moral decisions are, after all, made in real situations; they are qualitatively different from the solution of geometry problems. Women can and do give reasons for their acts, but the reasons often point to feelings, needs, impressions, and sense of personal ideal rather than to universal principles and their application." . . . "[A]s a result of this 'odd' approach women have often been judged inferior to men in the moral domain" (pp. 2-3).

Women in the study, in fact, reported a "need to talk to the participants" in decision-making processes and while doing other district business. One woman stated it this way:

It takes so much time to have a decision come to a real phase of implementation because so many, many, many people need to be involved in the process.

Gilligan (1982) points out the importance for women of a morality (ethic) defined as care for and sensitivity to others when she discusses the work of several well-known theorists in psychology and education; Freud, Piaget, and Kohlberg. For example, she reminds her readers

that Kohlberg's (1958) theory of six stages of moral development is derived from his empirical work based on a study of eighty-four boys whose development he followed for over twenty years. Girls simply "did not exist" in the study that was generalized across gender, race, sexual preference, and class (Gilligan, p. 18). And, "[a]lthough Kohlberg claims universality for his stage sequence, those groups not included in his original sample rarely reach his higher stages" (Edwards, 1975; Holstein, 1976; Simpson, 1974; cited in Gilligan, 1982, p. 18).

Women, in fact, when measured by Kohlberg's scale appear to be deficient in moral development because their "judgments seem to exemplify the third stage of his six-stage sequence. At this stage morality is conceived in interpersonal terms and goodness is equated with helping and pleasing others. This conception of goodness is considered by Kohlberg and Kramer (1969) to be functional in the lives of mature women insofar as their lives take place in the home. Kohlberg and Kramer imply that only if women enter the traditional arena of male activity will they recognize the inadequacy of this moral perspective and progress like men toward higher stages where relationships are subordinated to rules (stage four) and rules to universal principles of justice (stages five and six)" (Gilligan, 1982, p. 18).

Clearly, the position of superintendent of schools is in the traditional arena of male activity. Women viewed as successful in the position, however, continue to talk in terms of caring and relationships. They often do not move out of Kohlberg's third stage. This is not to say that they do not follow rules or pay attention to universal principles of justice (Rawls, 1971), rather, it is important to note that caring within relationships most often is dominant in their practice and rhetoric. Thus, it is important to value caring at least as much as principles and propositions. Doing so honors and values the mature ethical behavior of women in the superintendency and gives them the opportunity to demonstrate that their approach is constructive.

Noddings begins with *relation* as ontologically basic, which means that she recognizes human encounter and affective response as a basic fact of human existence. "This suggests," she states, "that the ethic to be developed is one of reciprocity, but our view of reciprocity will be different from that of 'contract' theorists such as Plato and John Rawls. . . . The focus of our attention will be upon how to meet the other morally. Ethical caring, the relation in which we do

meet the other morally, . . . [arises] out of natural caring -- that relation in which we respond as one-caring out of love or natural inclination. The relation of natural caring [is] identified as the human condition that we, consciously or unconsciously, perceive as 'good'" (pp. 4-5).

The notion of natural caring is a large part of the rhetoric and practice of women in the superintendency, and their rhetoric and practice most often had two equally important focuses: 1) relationships in general; and, 2) the well-being, both academically and generally, of the children in their districts. The focus on relationships was articulated in a variety of ways. One superintendent referred to caring throughout her interview particularly in regard to relationships. For example, when asked how she accomplished things, she replied:

Well, I think that what you do is you are able to admire the human resources of your staff and build personal relationships with highly talented people who want to grow, and who want to be their very best.

She continued by focusing on the importance of people around her:

Probably I think the third necessary component is network, and that probably builds personal contact with people with whom you share ideas, information, and resources.

In reference to herself when asked about her leadership style, she said:

About my own personal style, I know that I'm a very caring person. . . . I don't ever try to deny my femininity in my leadership role. . . .

Another superintendent talked about how she made certain that people were "taken care of" by making certain that they felt success in their work in the district. Even when decisions were made collaboratively, if somehow the decision brought "grief," she was the one who would "take" the grief. Conversely, she believed that any credit that was positive should go to the group.

No matter which way the decision goes, and who had the greatest influence on making it, if anything is wrong, I will take all the grief for it, you know. I will not take the good things for it because that goes to the people who have input. I firmly believe that if I absorb failure then everybody else feels success.

Another woman discussed how she had at one time executed a principled practice that she reported

"was politically correct" -- a type of ethics that felt foreign to her -- when she made decisions which she felt were, in principle, "right" for others. She soon discovered a discomfort with this practice because she sensed that she was manipulating people. She changed her practice for the sake of honesty and "goodness" in her relationships with people.

I pretty soon found out that people were doing what I was manipulating them into doing. And I, of course, believed that I was manipulating them into doing the right thing. But I think today that was just politically correct [something generally thought to be ethical]. I began to feel very dishonest. [not good] Now, I'm giving you a very round-about-way [of talking about her feelings], and there are times when I could use that same skill [and feel justified because it is generally thought to be ethical], but I don't -- in fact, people might even feel better about decisions [that were made that way]. . . Instead, I definitely try to listen to input from people.

Another superintendent talked about the "caring" that she believed others expected of her because she was a woman, something she felt would not be expected of men in the position.

The expectation is that she is to do everything the female of our culture has always done -- which is to pay attention to detail, to be caring, to do everything you would expect a female to do. Plus, the expectation is that she will also do what you expect the man [in the same position] to do. And I think that you would find that in this position, for example, with board members, a board member will ask a female superintendent to do things she would never even consider asking a male superintendent to do. And by that it's the expectation that a female will know about the details, is responsible for the caring of 15,000 employees. Whereas the expectation that a man shouldn't, isn't expected to do all the "nits and grits" plus all of the big decision making.

The second yet equally strong component of the narratives in regard to caring was the intense focus these women placed on the children literally "in their care" in their districts. The lives of children were of paramount importance to these women. To be sure, the nurturing of children has been an unquestioned part of what is most often the "feminine" domain. One superintendent

talked about the main focus of the district as it related to children:

When you talk about [our] school district, you can say it is a school district that really believes in the individual human potential of every child preserved. And, you hear that reflected both in the way people talk, but you also see it in what they do. There is a congruency there. What they talk about and what they live. . . . The values that we have are those that the community has for its children.

Another woman, when asked to define success, immediately spoke in terms of improving the lives of children. Many of the women noted that they believed they focused on children and curriculum/instruction issues much more than any men they knew or worked for in the past. They reflected that the conversations at national meetings among the men most often centered on finance and facilities. To be sure, research about superintendents (the vast percentage of whom are men) reveals a severe lack of attention to curriculum and instruction issues (Bredeson & Faber, 1994). On the other hand, women felt themselves and other women much more involved with curriculum and instruction because of its direct relationship to the lives of children. Many believed that their own success in their position was directly related to the outcomes for children. When talking about children, one woman did not refer to herself, rather she defined her success as something contingent on the educational success of the children in her care.

I measure success by the fact that 73% of the kids in (Name of town) graduated from high school the year I came, 81% graduate today. I measure success by the fact that we have many alternative schools where kids are getting degrees now instead of being out on the streets or in the jails. I don't feel successful because too many youngsters who have not been successful in academic areas are minority youngsters. I am still having real difficulty in getting our people in our elementary schools to believe that poor youngsters can learn. . . . I worry . . . about the children -- somebody's got to be responsible.

This particular aspect of caring is highlighted by Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995) when she argues that "Collin's (1991) use of caring refers not merely to affective connections between and among people but to the articulation of a greater sense of commitment to what scholarship . . . can mean in

the lives of people" (p. 474).

Triangulation

Because I did not ask people around the superintendents direct questions about the ethical practices of the woman superintendents, the data is less focused than the data on power. The superintendents' comments about ethical practices were most often centered around relationships, in general, and on the well-being and academic achievement of the children in their district.

References to the women's focus on relationships were frequent and varied. One assistant superintendent noted that her superintendent always made certain that everyone participated in the decision-making, and, further, that she cared enough for people that she made certain that everyone got public credit for their input. The superintendent's caring, attentive attitude was also evident in the way the assistant superintendent talked about the faith the superintendent had in everyone.

With Dr. (Name), it's like everything is laid out in the open, and you have the responsibility to share what you have with others and make certain that communication flows constantly through the organization. No information is withheld from us. Then when decisions are made, she will make certain that everyone knows who was involved in the decision. . . . She has a lot of faith in the opinions and beliefs of the group -- of everyone.

Many comments were made in triangulation interviews about the way women superintendents differ from men in the same position. Most felt that the difference centered on the "way women are" -- that is, women are "naturally" more concerned about relationships and do the "nice" things that make people "feel good." Women who did not do these things were viewed as "cold" and somehow less female. A male assistant superintendent made a statement directly related to the difference he saw in the practice of women superintendents and that of men superintendents.

I think that the entire perspective of women is different in how they interact with others. I think they are more nurturing by nature I just feel that they look at things differently often times than men do -- that there are things that they see and feel and enunciate that often are missed by men.

When talking about another superintendent, one man referred to the collaborative process

as one that was not only a process for decision-making, but also a process that allowed for taking care of the feelings of those working together.

I see a lot of qualities of collaboration [in decision-making] that are tied in with people's feelings in addition to the tasks that need to be accomplished.

At least one woman superintendent was extremely careful of the feelings of others even when she was angry with someone. A female high school principal reported the following:

Sometimes I have heard people say that Dr. (Name) just shouldn't try to be so nice to everybody. So they're sort of saying that at times she should just tell somebody off. Well, that really is not her style. But even the angriest I have seen her at somebody whether it's a board member or a businessman, I have not seen her literally tell somebody off. I mean she will be assertive and say what she wants to say but she never makes it a personal attack.

The evidence that these women "care for" people was best reflected in the following statement from a male elementary principal:

I think that (Name) is a very open, friendly person. I think she is very approachable and she has a nice way of interacting with people so they feel comfortable initially at the beginning of a meeting. Not just jumping into it and, you know, she moves ahead to make sure people are comfortable and she takes the time to know people and what's happening there, in their life. It's surprising how attentive to that sort of thing she is. Not that she delves into it too much, but she always pays attention to people when something is going on in their life. They maybe need a little extra time, or they need a little bit of support. She's very good about that.

When respondents talked about their superintendents' attention to children, they usually referred to the great commitment that their superintendents had to the scholarship of the students in their districts. One male assistant superintendent expressed the opinion of many when he stated:

She talks about children, decisions made in light of children and the relationship to learning and the setting and the teachers. Her greatest focus is on children learning.

I hear that a lot, all of the time.

Women Superintendents and the Intersection of Power and an Ethic of Care

The women in this study, who in their positions as superintendents defined power as collaboration, consensus building, or shared decision-making, appeared to have very little difficulty combining what they consider power with their notion of ethical, caring practice. Listen to the voice of one woman who very easily connected her use of power as collaboration and her ethic of caring:

I very seldom get things done alone. I can't think of anything where both collaboration and caring aren't a part of what I am--where they are not a part of my outcome. The people work harder when they can work together, I think, and when they are not fearful of consequences. But they also have to know that you care about them.

Later, she added when talking about her perception of how other people perceive the goals of the district:

They would be able to say there is a sense of vision, there is a sense of caring, there is a sense of collaboration. The values that I think they have seen are a part of our core development.

Another women when discussing what supports relationships and communication said:

To say how to communicate well, how to make sure that the words and the direction of the organization clarify the proper vision and establish a kind of participative ownership you want and the kind of relationship that you want, you must have the kind of communication that forces you to listen. What I'm really talking about is how do you help hear what's going on? How do you help to establish respect for all individuals? . . . I think that if you build an organization based on good listening and caring about one another sometime that cultural [difficulty] in communication is left out of the issue. Because, you are already listening carefully because you care about the person and what they have to say.

Triangulation

Because respondents were not specifically asked to discuss the combining of power and caring in the practice of their superintendents, the data was analyzed to discover whether women superintendents who defined power as "power with/to" also practiced administration in a caring way. Respondents implied in many ways that their superintendents combined power and care in their practice. One male assistant superintendent talked about the power his superintendent had because of the way she took care of relationships -- by not being intimidating, for example.

I think sometimes people think of power and they equate it with a visible presence commanding presence, intimidation, that sort of thing. Certainly, (Name) does not intimidate people. I don't think she projects that kind of an image. She doesn't attempt to in any way, shape or form and when I think of the other three superintendents that I worked for, there were certainly two of them that could be intimidating. Their presence could be intimidating to certain people. (Name), I believe, is a very powerful individual. Because she is able to establish relationships, because she is able to work with a variety of people, so many people, because she has been able to accomplish a lot in our district -- that's all given her a base of power, respect.

A male deputy superintendent who believed strongly that his superintendent practiced "power to" made the following observation about how she also took care of relationships:

I think she's very personally interested in group dynamics and individuals, and how to influence the group process. Relationships are very, very important to her. She's very interested in the way individuals interact with each other.

Another female assistant superintendent talked about the valuing (caring for) of people as a part of the collegial participatory mission of her superintendent.

She is a superb leader who has 20/20 vision yet values people's participation truly, honestly, and genuinely, and though she doesn't really need a lot of participation, she grows with it and moves with it and changes with it and really does help people to feel that they're part and parcel of a large and important collegial mission.

It is evident in the narratives that the combination of power defined as collaboration and ethics defined as caring "works" in a positive way in the practice of the women superintendents in this study.

Findings

This study yielded six significant findings about the practice of women superintendents in K-12 public schools. Originally driven by the desire to know whether a "feminine" definition and use of power -- "power with/to" or social production -- supports an ethic of care in the practice of superintendents, the study was enlightening in other ways as well. First, it confirmed the notion of many feminists and other political scientists that a social production, "power with/to" model of power is used by a number of women in positions of power, in part, because they are uncomfortable with a social control, "power over" model of power. Second, it made clear that one reason women use a social production model of power is because of their strong belief that relationships are important, and it is the social production model of power that values the voices, opinions, and input of other people.

Third, this study has shown that the women participants, in valuing relationships, are continuing to practice as "good" women should; that is, they are acting in accordance with our current cultural norms regarding gender appropriateness. Fourth, the research revealed that the women in the study focused primarily on two areas of care; taking care of relationships and caring for children. Fifth, it was their "caring" for children that focused women superintendents in the study on issues of curriculum and instruction in ways viewed as atypical for men in the same office. Finally, the study showed that when women define and practice power as social production or "power with/to" -- the "feminine" model of power -- they have no difficulty practicing an "ethic of care" -- the "feminine" model of ethics. In no small measure, the two concepts embrace each other.

Conclusion

I began this article suggesting that superintendents who practice power over others in a

controlling and dictatorial way have difficulty behaving in an ethical "caring" way while in their positions. I argued that superintendents who, in contrast, define and practice power as collaboration and consensus-building, a notion which relies on positive, less hierarchical relationships between people, are more able to connect with principals, teachers, parents, and children. More specifically, I asserted that the classical "feminine" definitions of power and ethics are mutually supportive of each other. In order to support my assertion, I examined the classical "feminine" definition of power in light of its potential to support and embrace an "ethic of care". This examination was completed by drawing on relevant literature and an ethnographic study of women superintendents.

This examination represents a beginning look at ways that the practices of women superintendents inform our efforts to rethink all aspects of educational administration -- from practice in the field to our university leadership preparation programs. There is a strong movement to build a new foundation of leadership preparation. For example, consider the focus of meetings supported by the Danforth Foundation and the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (Murphy, 1995). At the two meetings in St. Louis on March 31 and April 1, 1995 -- attended by 80 professors and school administrators, representatives from six nationally-based school improvement initiatives, and four facilitators -- the following question was discussed: How can an understanding of school improvement inform our conception of educational leadership and our understanding for the preparation needed for tomorrow's school leaders? In answering this question, the group posited not only a profile of leadership appropriate for improving schools, but also made several suggestions for leadership preparation programs.

Framed by an overt valuing of "common purpose . . . learning and teaching . . . a demise of hierarchy . . . shared models of leadership . . . bottom-up change strategies . . . community of caring" (Murphy, 1995, pp. 1-2) the participants set forth a three-pronged vision of leadership which parallels many of the practices of the women superintendents in my study. As researchers like Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995) and others continue to expand and alter the knowledge base on teacher preparation by reporting the actions of teachers who are successful in specific ways, so can we expand and redefine the knowledge base on educational leadership preparation by learning from

administrators who are already models for new notions of leadership.

Drawing on the literature and my study, I conclude that although not obvious on the surface, it might be supposed that traditional gender roles in the United States have predisposed women superintendents toward a use of power which relies on caring relationships between and among people. This "feminine" use of power potentially enables women in the superintendency to follow their hearts as they move to ease the rampant pain in the lives of children and adults in their districts. Further, it is their unique action while in the office of superintendent of schools that holds the promise of transformed practice for anyone, female or male, who accepts the challenges of this powerful position.

Notes:

1. Beck cites Starratt (1991) -- who recommends "the joining of three ethics; the ethic of critique, the ethic of justice, and the ethic of caring" (p. 186) when thinking about educational administration -- and others (i.e., Bellah, et. al., 1985; Bolman & Deal, 1984; Ellul, 1964; McGregor, 1960; Noddings, 1984; Ouchi, 1981; Sergiovanni, 1992) as she continues to build her argument that educational administrators need the support of a "multidimensional construct" when thinking about the ethics of their work and their workplace (p. 77).
2. Some feminists have been critical of the views of women and caring held by Gilligan (1982) and Noddings (1984, 1991). These feminists are critical of any essentialized notion of women (Weiler, 1988; cited in Ladson-Billings, 1995) and suggest that no empirical evidence exists to support the notion that women care in ways different from men or that any such caring informs their scholarship and work (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 473).
3. While stressing the contributions of female power theorists, I recognize that some men have also recognized the importance of "power with/to." For example, Talcott Parsons (1969) has argued that power should be regarded as the capacity of a social system to achieve its collective goals, Clarence Stone (1989) has argued that power involves the

capacity for social production as well as for social control, and Thomas Wartenberg (1990) has analyzed "transformative power." Because I wish to avoid oversimplifications such as positing the existence of a male conception of power and a female conception of power, I sometimes use the terminology of men who have contributed to the concept of "power with/to."

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